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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DOTE-00 FMC-01 CG-00 DLOS-09
OES-06 OPR-02 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 /059 W
----------122039Z 038569 /40
R 121528Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9947
INFO SECDEF WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, GR
SUBJECT: LONGSHOREMEN'S STRIKE AT PIRAEUS

REF: ATHENS 2124

1. THE LABOR DISPUTE AT THE PORT OF PIRAEUS CONTINUES. THREE THOUSAND LONGSHOREMEN AT PIRAEUS WERE ON STRIKE OVER THE FOUR-DAY EASTER WEEKEND. THEY BEGAN TO RETURN TO WORK ON APRIL 12, BUT ARE CONTINUING THEIR SLOWDOWN AND REFUSAL TO WORK OVERTIME WHICH HAVE LED TO INCREASING CONGESTION IN THE PORT AND DELAYS IN HANDLING CARGO SINCE EARLY FEBRUARY (REFTEL). THE STRIKE, WHICH ACTUALLY BEGAN ON APRIL 7, APPARENTLY HAD LITTLE EFFECT AS THE PORT IS BY CUSTOM INACTIVE DURING THE EASTER HOLIDAY. ON APRIL 12, NINETY-TWO SHIPS WERE IN PORT OR WAITING OUTSIDE, AN INCREASE IN ONLY FOUR SINCE THE DAY BEFORE THE STRIKE BEGAN.

2. THE PROFESSED REASON FOR THE STRIKE WAS A UNILATERAL DECISION TAKEN SOME WEEKS AGO BY THE PIRAEUS PORT AUTHORITY (OLP) TO INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF PERMANENT LONGSHOREMEN REQUIRED TO WORK THE UNPOPULAR AFTERNOON SHIFT. THE UNION CHOSE TO STRIKE ON THIS ISSUE THE
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DAY AFTER A LABOR ARBITRATION COURT ANNOUNCED A COMPULSORY SETTLEMENT OF THE UNION'S LONGSTANDING WAGE DISPUTE WITH OLP. THE SETTLEMENT CALLS FOR A TWO-STEP 15 PERCENT INCREASE IN THEIR BASIC DAILY WAGE, AN AMOUNT THE UNION REJECTED WHEN IT WAS OFFERED BY OLP. THE SETTLEMENT ALSO CALLS FOR VARYING, BUT SLIGHT, INCREASES IN SEVERAL FRINGE BENEFITS.

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3. BABIS LEFTHERIOTIS, PRESIDENT OF THE LONGSHOREMEN'S FEDERATION, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICIAL ON APRIL 12 THAT HE PROBABLY COULD OBTAIN THE AGREEMENT OF THE UNION MEMBERS TO THE 15 PER CENT WAGE INCREASE IF SUFFICIENT INCREASES WERE MADE IN THE DAILY RATES PAID FOR HANDLING A LONG LIST OF "SPECIAL CARGO" WHICH INCLUDES ITEM LIKE FISH MEAL, REFREGERATED FOOD AND EXPLOSIVES. ALTHOUGH THE RATES ARE PAID ON A "DAILY" BASIS, THE OFFICIAL LEVEL OF TONNAGE WHICH CONSTITUTES A DAY'S WORK IS SO LOW THAT THE AVERAGE LONGSHOREMAN CAN MOVE, AND BE PAID FOR, THREE DAY'S TONNAGE DURING A SINGLE SHIFT. THUS, THE SPECIAL CARGO RATES FREQUENTLY EXCEED A WORKER'S BASIC WAGE.

4. LEFTHERIOTIS SAID THAT HIS MEMBERS WANT MORE THAN TWICE THE INCREASE IN THE SPECIAL CARGO RATES AWARDED BY THE COURT. HE SAID THAT OLP IS READY TO GRANT THE HIGHER INCREASE, BUT MINISTER OF MERCHANT MARINE PAPADONGONAS HAS REFUSED TO DO SO SINCE THIS WOULD BRING THE SETTLEMENT WELL ABOVE THE GOG'S WAGE INCREASE GUIDELINES. LEFTHERRIOTIS SAID HE WOULD BE MEETING TODAY WITH PAPADONGONAS TO ATTEMPT TO REACH A COMPROMISE, BUT THAT HIS MEMBERS WERE PREPARED TO CONTINUE THEIR CURRENT SLOWDOWN INDEFINITELY IF THEIR DEMANDS WERE NOT MET.
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